

# Austins to build in Ledgeview

## Family chain plans October opening for grocery store

By Tom Murphy

Press-Gazette

LEDGEVIEW — Austin Super Markets Inc. said today it has purchased about three acres of land on Redbird Circle south of East De Pere High School to build a 30,000-square-foot grocery store.

Chuck Austin of Allouez, head

of the 41-year-old chain, said ground will be broken this spring with an October opening planned.

The family-operated, independent chain also runs The Original Austins at 3823 S. Webster Ave. in Allouez.

Stores also are in Chilton and Sheboygan Falls.

Austin's sons, Bob, Rick and Steve, are in the family business.

The site in the town of Ledgeview is just south of the Marathon gas station.

Chuck Austin said he believed the new store would complement the Allouez location rather than compete for customers.

The Allouez store is comparatively small and already draws well, Austin said.

The new store will have parking for 250 vehicles and accommodate the strong growth in east De Pere and the town of Ledgeview, he said.

Between 1990 and 1995, De Pere's population grew by more than 1,800 people, according to the state Demographic Services Cen-

ter.

During the same period, Ledgeview's population grew to 1,807 from 1,568, a gain of more than 15 percent.

Beth Brey of First Security Credit Union said the organization has plans to build a separate building attached to the south side of the grocery.

First Security now has offices on South Ashland Avenue, Ashwaubenon, at Erie and George streets, De Pere; Main Street, Green Bay, and on Lineville Road, Howard.



Press-Gazette map





Press-Gazette photo by John E. Roemer.

**Family affair:** Chuck Austin, second from left, is flanked by his three sons, each a manager of an Austin Store. Photographed at the Original Austin's, 3823 S. Webster

Ave., the group includes, from left, Rick, manager at Sheboygan Falls; Chuck; Bob, manager at Appleton, and Steve, manager at Chilton.

# Success is all in the family

## Chuck Austin credits wife, children for stores' growth

By Lisa Hildebrand

Of the Press-Gazette

After 14 years of working for a Green Bay cheese processing company, Chuck Austin decided to take a chance.

He heard a "funny little store on the West Side" was for sale. Although he had no experience in the grocery business, he bought the store on South Ridge Road.

"I was the worst-equipped person to go into business," said Austin, reflecting on the birth of the original Austin's supermarkets in 1953.

What started in that "funny little store" has grown to include four stores in four eastern Wisconsin communities — Allouez, Appleton, Chilton and Sheboygan Falls. The stores have combined sales of \$20 million a year, Austin said.

Since the beginning, a dedicated family has been largely responsible for the stores' success, he said.

In the early days, his wife, Gwen, would be at the Ridge Road store baking by 3 a.m. Later she would go home and concentrate on another demanding job — raising five children.

The Austin family soon grew to six children — four sons and two daughters. Three of the Austins' sons — Bob, Rick and Steve — now manage three of the four stores.

Bob manages the Appleton store and is in charge of insurance and pension programs for the company's 200 employees. Rick, manager of the Sheboygan Falls store, handles advertising and buying. Steve manages the Chilton



### Shop talk

store and is responsible for the business's computerization and three trucks.

"We have great family pride," Chuck Austin said. "There's a lot of reward that comes with it."

Austin, 66, and the sons who manage the stores meet every Tuesday at the different stores to discuss business. Although Austin no longer participates in the day-to-day operation of the stores, he manages the company's real estate.

The company owns the buildings that house the four stores.

Austin's supermarkets have had four homes in the Green Bay area since the store on Ridge Road opened.

That store and others, on Gray Street and Libal Street, came and went. But after 18 years out of the Green Bay market, the Original Austin's returned in May 1984 to its current location at 3823 S. Webster Ave.

That 14,000-square-foot store, managed by Barb Huibregtse, is the smallest of the four.

The stores added "Original" to their name when the Webster Avenue store opened. The name was changed to distinguish the stores from other Austin's that, although sold by

Chuck Austin, retained the Austin name.

All four stores are perhaps best known for their meat departments. The tradition started with the Ridge Road store and a retired butcher from Milwaukee, Bob Behrendt, and continues today under the leadership of Jerry McCabe. He has been with Austin's for 25 years and manages the Appleton meat department.

None of Austin's meat is prewrapped. Chuck Austin said that doesn't improve the quality of the meat, but he said the store offers a good selection and personal contact between customer and employee.

"No matter how sophisticated our society becomes, people still like things to be one on one," he said Austin.

The stores also stress fresh bakery goods and produce.

The four stores are served by Northland Associated Grocers, a co-op type warehouse in Norway, Mich., which serves about 300 stores in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Wisconsin.

You won't see bold, bright advertising or offers for free dishes or silverware at Austin's. They would rather stress quality products and friendly service.

"We're kind of a soft-sell company," said Austin.

Despite the recent growth of big warehouse-type grocery stores, Austin said there still is a place for his type of business.

"We try to do as good a job as we can and not worry about them," he said. "There are a lot of people with a lot of different buying habits."